

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

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Mexico: Human rights violations must be investigated by civilian authorities

Yesterday the Inter-American Court of Human Rights once again urged the Mexican authorities to stop using military courts for the prosecution of human rights violations.

The court reiterated its request as it passed judgement on the case of environmental activists Teodoro Cabrera García and Rodolfo Montiel Flores who were arbitrarily detained and subjected to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment by members of the army in 1999. According to the sentence, the authorities are also obliged to investigate the allegations of torture and other abuses, to bring those responsible to justice and to provide reparation for the harm done to the victims.

This is the fifth conviction handed down against the Mexican State by the Inter-American Court in the past twelve months. However, the authorities have complied with very few of the obligations imposed under previous judgements.

Four of the five judgements refer to human rights violations committed by members of the army. In them the Court reiterates that the Mexican State is under an obligation to refrain from using military justice for those types of offences. According to the Court, the proposed reform recently presented by President Calderón fails to meet that obligation and it is therefore the responsibility of Congress to amend it and pass it into law.

Amnesty International hopes that the authorities will expeditiously comply with the obligations laid down in this judgement and the previous ones.

Background

On 2 May 1999 soldiers from the Mexican Army detained peasants Teodoro Cabrera and Rodolfo Montiel in the community of Pizotla, in the municipality of Ajuchitlán del Progreso, Guerrero State. Both peasant farmers were activists who had denounced logging and had worked to protect forests in the region. Teodoro Cabrera and Rodolfo Montiel were held in military custody for two days before being brought before a local judge. They were later convicted of possessing banned weapons and growing poppies and marijuana.

Amnesty International adopted both environmental activists as prisoners of conscience in 2000. Their sentences were later commuted to house arrest on health grounds.